



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

REPORT

REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES, OPEN GOVERNMENT AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

DATE: January 25, 2006

REPORT NO.: CC-06-01

SUBJECT: FORMATION OF AN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE

ISSUE

To consider the Council's formation of an Elections Task Force to study and make recommendations regarding election-related issues.

BACKGROUND

On October 17, 2005, the City Clerk presented information on Instant Runoff Voting to the City's Government Efficiency and Openness Committee. During the course of discussion, it became clear that there were a number of elections-related issues that would benefit from an organized process of research and discussion, with subsequent recommendations to the City Council.

The Clerk returned to the Government Efficiency and Openness Committee on November 21, 2005, to present information on forming an Elections Task Force. The Committee accepted the Clerk's report and has recommended to the City Council that an Elections Task Force be formed consisting of one nominee from each Councilmember and the Mayor, and that it be chaired by the Clerk.

DISCUSSION

The following topics have been identified as initial matters for a potential Task Force to study and make recommendations regarding:

1. Mail-Only Ballot

Holding an election by mail could be enacted by ordinance, could result in cost savings of 30-50% over a standard election, and would likely have varied impacts on voter participation. With feedback from the Registrar of Voters regarding impacts to the election and canvass process, it would be worthwhile to explore the ramifications of holding certain types of elections by mail.

2. Instant Run-off Voting (IRV)

The concept of instant run-off voting is multifaceted, and several elements would require research prior to a true assessment of its feasibility. Because there are a variety of IRV types, the Task Force would have to determine those most suitable for potential use here. Additional areas of study would include potential impacts to consolidated elections, and the cost and funding issues involved in implementing and certifying the voting system.

3. Relationship to Registrar of Voters (ROV)

Currently, the City contracts for election services with the County of San Diego Registrar of Voters. The Registrar's staffing, expertise and equipment have historically provided for an efficient, effective election process. Nevertheless, it would be practical to investigate the availability of private vendors offering similar services as alternatives, particularly should the City decide to pursue mail-only ballots or instant run-off voting.

4. Voter Outreach

Recent attention has been given to voter turnout in a variety of jurisdictions; the City may wish to examine the issue of voter outreach to boost public participation in municipal elections.

TASK FORCE CREATION

Following Charter Section 43(b) guidelines, a citizen advisory group would be assembled by the City Council to address the elections-related items described above, and any additional appropriate items. The task force would then report back to the Rules Committee for feedback and approval prior to moving to the full Council. It would be temporary in nature, and would have the following structure:

Chair: City Clerk

City Staff: Mayor's Office
City Attorney

Citizen Members: One nomination from each Councilmember and the Mayor, to be submitted to the City Clerk.

For advisory groups formed under Charter Section 43(b), it is fairly unique for the Clerk to act as Chair. In this case, however, it has merit. The Clerk is the elections official for the City of San Diego and, since many of the topics under consideration by this task force have the potential to impact the elections process, the Clerk would need to have an active role in crafting the reports and presentations that come from the task force.

A representative from the Registrar of Voters would be available for input and ongoing feedback for information about impacts to the current voting process.

Additionally, experts from each of the areas under review would be asked to present their ideas, suggestions and recommendations. Similarly, representatives from the League of Women Voters and any other elections-focused community or outreach group would be encouraged to attend and provide information.

CONCLUSION

Over the past several years, a variety of issues relating to the municipal election process have surfaced. An Elections Task Force would provide the City with a vehicle for discussing and bringing forward items for consideration by the full City Council.

Submitted by:


Elizabeth Maland, City Clerk

cc: Michael Aguirre, City Attorney
Ronne Froman, Chief Operating Officer